

Internal branding at university: Do tenure and job security matter?

Marta Retamosa¹, Ángel Millán¹, Juan A. García³, María Millán⁴

¹Department of Marketing, Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, Ciudad Real, Spain,

³Department of Marketing, Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, Talavera de la Reina, Spain, ⁴Faculty of Education, Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, Ciudad Real, Spain.

Abstract

Universities, as educational service providers, must pay attention to their employees who are pivotal in delivering and communicating brand promise and service quality to the stakeholders. While branding initiatives most frequently focus on external stakeholders, internal branding efforts establish systems/processes and consequent employees' behaviour that are consistent with external branding efforts. With a sample of 753 faculty members and researchers from a Spanish public University, the study aims to establish if employee tenure and job security have a significant relationship with employees' brand commitment and employees' brand supporting behaviour. An analysis of variance was carried out for testing the hypothesis. Differences were found according to tenure in employees' brand commitment while job security did not impact significantly on employees' brand commitment. In addition, a positive and significant relationship were found between employees' brand supporting behaviour and tenure, but not for job security. For business practitioners, this research state that it is essential for service companies, such as universities, to use differing approaches to employees according to their organisational tenure as an important managerial implication.

Keywords: *Internal Branding; Job security; Employee tenure; Employee-brand supporting behaviour; brand commitment.*

1. Introduction

Universities now operate in an environment characterized by high competition, the lack of financing and declining demand for students (Assad *et al.*, 2013; Yu *et al.*, 2018). As a result, many institutions of higher education (HEIs) are gradually adopting market-oriented strategies to differentiate themselves from competing universities. In this context, the brand strategy is a fundamental tool to gain competitive position and differentiate (Hemsley-Brown & Lowrie, 2010).

Heretofore, previous studies have been more focused on the external aspects of the brand and the perspective of students (Stephenson & Yerger, 2014), ignoring the importance of managing the brand internally. While branding initiatives most frequently focus on external stakeholders, internal marketing, employee branding and/or internal branding efforts establish systems/processes and consequent employees' behaviour that are consistent with external branding efforts (Aurand *et al.*, 2005).

Employees who are in consensus with an organisation's brand are more likely to act consistently in ways supporting how the organisation hopes that external constituencies perceive it and its products/services (Aurand *et al.*, 2005). While employees are pivotal in delivering and communicating brand promise and service quality to external stakeholders, the relevance for HEIs to engage their employees in the brand building process is acknowledged (Judson *et al.*, 2009).

Nevertheless, organisations should pay attention to the differences between different demographic and psychographic groups of employees (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Yu *et al.*, 2018). Tsui *et al.* (1992) found that employees' psychological commitment and behaviours might vary because of demographic heterogeneity. Moreover, other studies have identified those variables that might influence organisational and brand identification and commitment (Yu *et al.*, 2018). These studies have evaluated personal variables (e.g. age and gender) and situational variables (e.g. tenure and function).

However, to date, there have been few analyses of the relationship between these situational variables (tenure and function) and different dimensions of internal branding like brand commitment and employee brand supporting behaviour. This study aims to examine differences in brand commitment and employee brand supportive behaviour, according to tenure and job security.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Brand commitment

The concept of employee commitment is central at an organisational strategy. Typically, is defined as the relative strength of an individual's identification with the involvement in a particular organisation, characterised by strong acceptance of and a belief in an organisation and a strong desire to maintain membership of the organisation (Mowday *et al.*, 1982).

The conceptualization of brand commitment employed in this research derives from Allen and Meyer's (1990) definition of organisational commitment and is described as a psychological state that exemplifies an employee's relationship with the brand. Although Allen and Meyer (1990) acknowledge three distinct types of commitment (i.e., affective, normative, and continuance), we focus only on affective commitment, which is defined as employees' emotional attachment to the brand. Previous studies have already demonstrated the importance of the commitment in internal branding process (Xiong & King, 2015).

According to Van Nguyen *et al.* (2019), employees, the longer their organisational tenure, the more familiar they will become with their role and organisational culture. Therefore, accumulating years of tenure could affect their ability to seek out and absorb the brand awareness provided by the organization's internal brand campaigns.

In this study, the organisational tenure concept refers to the number of years an individual has spent working for a respective organisation (Oshagbemi, 2000). Strong identification is developed over the long term, when individuals have passed an extended period working in an organisation and have embedded the organisation's objectives, and key attributes into their self-concepts (Hammed *et al.*, 2013). Riketta (2005) found using a meta-analysis study that tenure is significantly related to organisational identification.

Another variable considered at this study is job security. Probst (2003) defined this concept as the perceived stability and continuance of one's job as one knows it'. It represents an employee's perceptions of whether he or she can continue to maintain employment and whether the desired characteristics of his or her job are stable.

Employees who experience job insecurity may find it difficult to predict what will happen in the future and to decide on the appropriate reaction within the organisation. In other words, they are confronted with the uncertainty of how to behave and what to expect in their work environment, and have a strong motivation to regain the social order originally expected in the organisation (Loi *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1. Tenure has a positive impact on employees' brand commitment.

H2. Job security has a positive impact on employees' brand commitment.

2.2. Employees' brand supporting behaviour

Morhart *et al.* (2009) define employee-brand building behaviour as employees' contribution (both on and off the job) to an organisation's customer-oriented branding efforts. According to Judson *et al.* (2006), employee brand support can be defined as the actions of employees that deliver the brand's values to stakeholders. From a marketing and communication approach, employees tend to support their organisation's brand by means of understanding the brand and incorporating the brand values in their day-to-day operation.

Managers can enhance internal branding mechanisms by taking into consideration tenure and job security, as factors influencing in the internal branding (Dechawatanapaisal, 2019). Therefore, institutions need to plan those activities based on the organisation's brand values in order to foster brand-supportive behaviour among employees (Aurand *et al.*, 2005).

In accordance with the literature on the theory of social identity, Picolli *et al.* (2017) stated that job insecurity is related to reduced levels of identification with the organisation and, consequently, to low tasks performance. By creating a sense of belonging and providing a positive basis for the social identity of employees, managers can increase involvement and attachment to the organisation. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H3. Tenure has a positive impact on employees' brand supporting behaviour.

H4. Job security has a positive impact on employees' brand supporting behaviour.

3. Method and results

3.1. Data collection and instrument

The situation of Spanish public universities from 2012 onwards began a decline in the relative participation of permanent teaching staff, which lost 8,288 staff in the period 2008 to 2017, representing 16.2% of the total initial staff (CRUE, 2019). In this study, a sample of 753 faculty members and researchers from a Spanish public University participated in this study. An email was sent to all university staff (i.e., 2,431 according to the institutional statistics) inviting them to participate in an online survey, obtaining a response rate of 31%. Most respondents were aged between 35 and 54 years (65.6%). The tenure was ranged between 1 and 36 years, with an average of 14.93 years ($SD = 8.86$). The permanent academic staff comprised 55.2% of the sample.

In addition to the classification data (i.e., gender, age, tenure and staff position), the questionnaire also included: (1) four items to assess the employees' brand commitment, adapted from Yu *et al.* (2018); and (2) five items related to employees' brand supporting behaviour (Aurand *et al.*, 2005). All items were rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

3.2. Results

Statistical analyses were carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics 19.0 and R version 3.6.0. Before testing the hypotheses, the reliability of the scales was evaluated using ordinal alpha ($O\alpha$), which is a measurement of the internal consistency of the items in the instrument. The $O\alpha$ was 0.91 for employees' brand commitment scale and 0.84 for the employees' brand supporting behaviour scale. The scores for these two constructs were, therefore, calculated as the average of these four and five items, respectively, for the subsequent analyses.

With regard to the hypotheses testing, the differences in employees' brand commitment (H1 and H2) and brand supporting behaviour (H3 and H4) according to tenure and job security were studied by: (1) the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedure when the homogeneous variance assumption was correct; or (2) Welch robust test of equality of means when the variances were heterogeneous.

Regarding the employees' brand commitment (Table 1), differences were found according to tenure. Specifically, those employees who had been working at this university between 16 and 20 years had a higher brand commitment than those who had between 6 and 10 years of experience. The Spearman correlation coefficient (r_s) between brand commitment and tenure was 0.073 ($p = 0.044$). Therefore, H1 was supported. H2 was rejected because job security did not impact significantly on employees' brand commitment.

Table 1. Differences in employees' brand commitment according to tenure and job security.

(Hypothesis) Factor	N	M	SD	Levene test		ANOVA/Welch test		Games Howell Test ($p < 0.05$)
				F	p	F	p	
<i>(H1) Tenure</i>				2.482	0.030	2.481a	0.032	16-20 > 6-10
1-5 years	130	4.38	0.67					
6-10 years	144	4.29	0.72					
11-15 years	119	4.33	0.75					
16-20 years	166	4.51	0.56					
21-25 years	85	4.43	0.71					
> 25 years	109	4.47	0.63					
<i>(H2) Job security</i>				0.106	0.744	1.737	0.188	
Permanent	337	4.37	0.65					
Non-permanent	416	4.43	0.69					

Note: a Asymptotically F distributed.

The results obtained in relation to H3 showed a positive and significant relationship between employees' brand supporting behaviour and tenure ($r_s = 0.081$, $p = 0.027$). This provided support for H3, although the ANOVA (performed with tenure in five-year intervals) did not reveal statistically significant differences in employees' brand supporting behaviours (Table 2). H4 was, however, rejected.

Table 2. Differences in employees' brand supporting behaviour according to tenure and job security.

(Hypothesis) Factor	N	M	SD	Levene test		ANOVA/Welch test		Games Howell Test ($p < 0.05$)
				F	p	F	p	
<i>(H3) Tenure</i>				0.715	0.612	1.666	0.141	
1-5 years	130	3,47	0,65					
6-10 years	144	3,40	0,73					
11-15 years	119	3,46	0,71					
16-20 years	166	3,62	0,71					
21-25 years	85	3,47	0,82					
> 25 years	109	3,53	0,75					
<i>(H4) Job security</i>				3.516	0.061	0.672	0.413	
Permanent	337	3.47	0.67					
Non-permanent	416	3.52	0.77					

Finally, two regression analyses, in which sex and age were also included as explanatory variables, were conducted to test the results' robustness. In the case of employees' brand commitment, only a significant and negative effect was obtained for the tenure interval of 6 to 10 years ($\beta = -0.238$, $t = -2.093$, $p = 0.037$). In the case of employees' brand supporting behaviour, none of the parameters associated with tenure and job security was significant.

4. Conclusions

The study of internal branding in universities and its effects from a marketing perspective in combination with its relevant mechanisms is crucial in order to fully understanding the way in which a brand can resonate among all its stakeholders (Sujchaphong *et al.*, 2015).

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between employee tenure, job security and internal brand consequences such as brand commitment and brand supportive behaviour. Findings of the study indicate that tenure has a positive influence on brand

commitment and brand supportive behaviour. On the other hand, this research could not support the hypothesized positive effect of job security on brand commitment and brand supporting behaviour.

As an important managerial implication for business practitioners, our research state that it is essential for service companies, such as universities, to use differing approaches to employees according to their organisational tenure. That is in line with Van Nguyen *et al.* (2019) who stated that the effectiveness of internal branding campaigns and brand leadership might be affected by the employee tenure.

Future studies may enrich existing knowledge of employee internal branding via a cross-faculty and/or cross-discipline research. Moreover, further studies could investigate how such faculty brands co-exist and interact with the broader university brand.

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